

INCARCERATED FATHERS INITIATIVE – HEAD START

The Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families has funded a planning grant with the purpose of identifying and providing resources and supports for families of children enrolled in or eligible to enroll in Head Start or Early Head Start that have an incarcerated father or a father under the supervision of the Board of Probation and Parole. The Department of Social Services through the Family Support Division was awarded implementation funding effective July 1, 2005.

Goal and objectives as outlined in the proposal are:

Program Goal: Strengthen low income families with children that have an incarcerated father or a father under supervision of the probation or parole system.

Objective 1: Support children currently enrolled in Head Start who have incarcerated fathers, and increase referrals of eligible children with incarcerated fathers into Head Start.

- Increase opportunities for children to thrive through effective parenting of mothers and fathers and sensitive care-giving of Head Start staff, based on the increased availability of parent and staff training.
- Increase the access of children to their fathers through provision of transportation for visits, supervised visitation during probation/parole, and development of closed-circuit television visitation options.
- Improve the screening, assessment, and referral of children for supportive services by Head Start personnel and other professionals.
- Increase the materials available at Head Start to help children cope with having an incarcerated parent.
- Increase the referral of eligible children with incarcerated fathers into Head Start through new interagency partnerships and referral protocols.

Objective 2: Provide parenting support to incarcerated fathers and fathers released for probation/parole whose children are enrolled in Head Start or eligible to enroll in Head Start.

- Provide long-term support groups for fathers (e.g., Long Distance Dads and Foundations of Fatherhood).
- Provide group parent education classes, individual coaching, and linkage with mother/child parent education services, with a focus on children ages birth to five years (e.g., Parents as Teachers training).
- Provide information and referral for employment and job training opportunities (e.g., Parents Fair Share program).

- Provide fathers with a brief overview of their rights and responsibilities as fathers, strategies for interacting with the mothers of their children, strategies for bonding with their children, and resources for parenting (e.g., Proud Parents).
- Provide needed supports to facilitate father/child contact (e.g., transportation, closed-circuit television visitation, supervised visitation).

Objective 3: Improve family well-being for families of children enrolled in or eligible for Head Start, whose fathers are incarcerated/on probation or parole.

- Provide couple skills training/counseling for mothers and fathers who are incarcerated or on probation or parole.
- Provide opportunities for family mediation to mothers and fathers.
- Provide parent education classes for couples at Head Start.

Objective 4: Provide training and resources to Head Start teachers, service coordinators (e.g., family advocates or family liaisons), and other professionals working with children of incarcerated parents and their families.

- Develop a statewide listserve for interested Head Start grantees to access information concerning the issues of incarceration for children.
- Increase access to training for Head Start personnel and other professions working with this target population.
- Add materials and resources to Head Start programs with a high incidence of children who have incarcerated fathers.

Objective 5: Develop a statewide plan to address the effects of incarceration and poverty on young children and their families.

- Connect the existing stakeholders in Missouri through collaborative planning, distribution of responsibilities, and joint decision-making. Include representative fathers who are incarcerated or on probation and parole and mothers of children in Head Start in the planning process.
- Assess the scope of the problem and the statewide resources available to address it.
- Develop agreements that systemically build the safety net for all Head Start-eligible children who have incarcerated/released fathers, regardless of their geographic location. This will include the establishment of statewide protocols for providing referrals to fathers and families and for assigning service coordination.
- Build a mechanism for mobilizing resources to the geographic areas with the highest incidence of need.

Children currently enrolled in or eligible to enroll in Head Start or Early Head Start with incarcerated fathers or fathers under the supervision of the Division of Probation and Parole will benefit from increased involvement with both parents, improved decision-making by both parents and decreased conflict between parents. They will also benefit from less intimidating visitation environments,

which are more developmentally appropriate and conducive to building positive father/child relationships.

Fathers who are incarcerated or on probation or parole with children enrolled in or eligible to enroll in Head Start or Early Head Start will derive self-esteem as they create or re-establish their roles as active parents who take responsibility for their children's emotional and financial needs. Fathers will gain knowledge about positive parenting and child development, resulting in greater involvement in decision-making about their children. Fathers, upon their release, will spend more time with their children; demonstrate increased parenting knowledge in their interactions with their children; promote their children's health, education and well-being; interact more effectively with the custodial parent; and provide more reliable financial support.

Families with children enrolled in or eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start with an incarcerated father or a father under the supervision of the Division of Probation and Parole and will ultimately benefit from increased financial support for their children and community resources addressing their family's needs. They will gain improved relationships with the children's father and partnership in child-rearing decisions and providing for their children's emotional needs.

Head Start/Early Head Start staff and other professionals working with children of incarcerated fathers and fathers on probation or parole will benefit from specialized training and increased resources to meet the needs of the families affected by incarceration.

Other Systems will benefit from improved relationships among state agencies as they continue to develop strategies for cooperating to achieve mutual goals and objectives. In particular, Department of Corrections, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, University of Missouri, and the judicial system will continue to expand collaborative relationships with the Family Support Division.

Partnerships that have been formed for this grant are:

- Missouri Department of Social Services
- Missouri Head Start State Collaboration Office
- Missouri Department of Corrections
- Missouri Division of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Office of State Court Administrators
- Division of Workforce Development
- University of Missouri-Kansas City, Institute for Human Development
- University Outreach and Extension
- Children's Services Commission
- Parents as Teachers National Center
- United Methodist Churches of Missouri

The approach uses existing networks and builds on previous successes, as well as lessons learned from the current Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project. The proposed project focuses on partnerships to promote efficiency within statewide systems and the usage of already available technology, such as that available through University Outreach and Extension offices and Head Start programs in every county, along with Probation and Parole offices. Built into this approach is the potential for making resources available throughout the state, including both remote rural areas and impoverished urban areas. The likelihood for success of this project is greatly enhanced by the expanded collaboration that the identified agencies have already experienced. Together they underwent a strategic planning process, in which they placed a high priority on serving children and families of incarcerated fathers, fathers upon their release to probation and parole, and practitioners who work with these populations. They eagerly embraced the opportunity to continue to work cooperatively and collaboratively on this project, a work that will be extensive and multi-disciplinary.